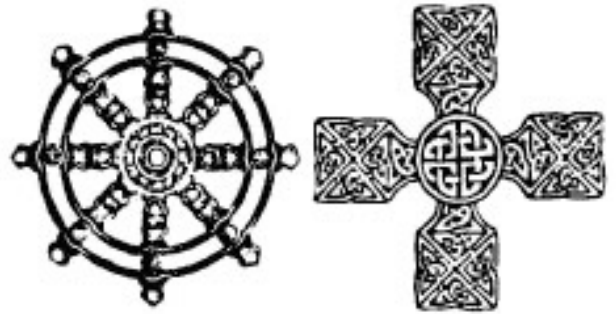


Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter



Vol. 44

Fall 2009

News of the Society

2009 Annual Meeting Program

**American Academy of Religion (AAR)
November 6-10, 2009
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**SBCS Board Meeting: Friday, Nov. 6, 9:00-11:30
AM, 1:00-3:30 PM, PDC-512B**

**SBCS Session 1: Friday, Nov. 6, 4:00-6:30 PM, PDC-
514B**

**Theme: The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism,
Christianity, and Science**

Through a review of *The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity and Science* (2008), this session will address Buddhist, Christian, and scientific insights into the inadequacies of conceptualization and language for understanding reality. The book's editor will give an overview, followed by chapter reviews by two contributors, two responses, and open discussion including other contributors to this Templeton project.

Panelists:

Paul Numrich, Theological Consortium of
Greater Columbus

Paul Ingram, Pacific Lutheran University

Dennis Hirota, Ryukoku University

Responding:

Sandra Costen Kunz, Phillips Theological
Seminary

Amos Yong, Regent University

Other contributors:

John Albright, Lutheran School of Theology

Roger Blomquist, Argonne National Laboratory

Tom Christenson, Capital University

David McMahan, Franklin and Marshall

Mark Unno, University of Oregon

**SBCS Session 2: Saturday, Nov. 7, 9:00-11:30 AM,
LCS-Joyce**

**Theme: Discussion of Paul Ingram's *Buddhist-
Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science***

Advanced registration for the AAR annual meeting is \$135 (member) and \$275 (nonmember). To register and to arrange housing, go to www.aarweb.org.

For more information, contact the AAR at 1-800-575-7185 (USA & Canada), 1-330-425-9330

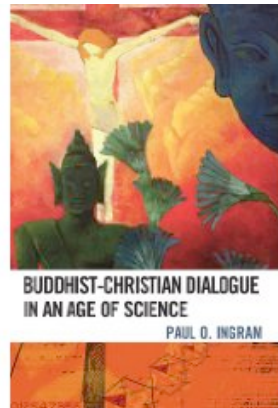
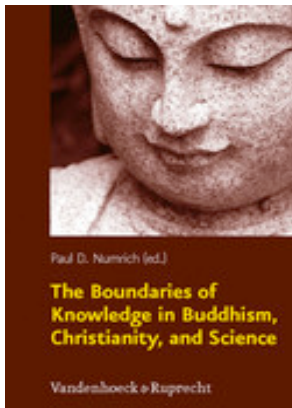
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(outside USA & Canada), or aarreg@experient-inc.com.

Featured Books for 2009 Meeting

The sessions of the SBCS at the 2009 AAR annual meeting in Montreal will focus on two recent publications in Buddhist-Christian studies.

Paul D. Numrich, ed., *The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity and Science* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). ISBN: 978-3525569870. Order at www.v-r.de/en/.



Paul Ingram, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007). ISBN: 978-0742562158. Order at www.rowmanlittlefield.com.

SBCS Book Award for 2010

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies is now receiving nominations for the 2010 Frederick Steng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Nominations must be received by December 31, 2009. The winner will be announced at the annual meeting of the Society on October 29, 2010.

The criteria for nominating and making the award are:

1. The subject matter of the book should be inspired by and relevant to Buddhist-Christian relations, but subject matter is not narrowly limited to books on dialogue or to books that are half on Christianity and half on Buddhism.
2. The scholarship must be original and the writing clear. The book must make an important contribution to issues relevant to the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.
3. Books can be considered for nomination within five years of their publication date (i.e. the 2010 award must be for a book published in 2004 or later).

Nominations can be made by any person other than the author(s) or editor(s), using the [downloadable nomination form](http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/BookAwardNominationForm.doc) at <http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/BookAwardNominationForm.doc>.

The completed form may be sent electronically to ayong@regent.edu or a printed copy can be submitted by postal mail to Prof. Amos Yong, Chair of the Frederick Steng Book Award Committee, Regent University School of Divinity, 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464 USA.

Self-nominations are not permitted. Publishers of books must be willing to supply review copies to members of the committee for evaluation in order for the book to be considered.

CONFERENCES & DIALOGUES

Eighth Conference of European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies

Authority in Buddhism & Christianity

St. Ottilien, Germany, 11-15 June 2009

*John D'Arcy May, Irish School of Ecumenics,
Trinity College Dublin*

With a higher proportion of Buddhist participants from Europe, Asia and the US than ever

before, the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies at its recent conference in the Benedictine Archabbey of St. Ottilien near Munich addressed the question of authority, both spiritual and temporal, in the two traditions. There seems to have been little comparative study of this topic, and there were many surprises as the speakers were confronted with aspects which they had not been aware of in their own traditions and in those of others.

The Conference began with intercultural music that drew on Christian and Buddhist themes. After this, Bro. Josef Götz spoke about the Benedictine Archabbey of St Ottilien, stressing its longstanding and enriching participation in inter-monastic dialogue. Elizabeth Harris, the incoming President of the Network, then introduced the theme. She pointed to contemporary literature in English that represented the crisis in authority in the West and stressed that this was compounded by the awareness that some of those with power to enforce authority in the world did not possess legitimacy. She then raised a series of questions connected with the different forms of authority to be discussed at the conference from the balance between external and internal authority to the struggle with institutional authority for equality between men and women. She hoped for three outcomes from the conference: that participants would be able to explore what their own tradition said about authority; that they would give wisdom to each other on the theme, Buddhist to Christian and Christian to Buddhist; and that all would reflect on how they represented themselves to the wider society, both to those searching for religious authority and those rejecting all authority.

Following up this theme of a contemporary crisis of authority, *Rita Gross* said that Buddhists, in the spirit of the teaching on impermanence (*anicca*), need to take seriously the historicity of their different traditions in order to develop a non-sectarian history of Buddhism which acknowledges the authenticity of the foundational Buddhism of the first 400 years. The *Kalamasutta*, which was cited again and again in the course of the discussion, urges the Buddhist to assess the trustworthiness of teachers and their teaching, but criteria such as 'What the wise would accept' or whether a text is accepted by the *sangha* raise the problem of determining what constitutes wisdom and the authenticity of a text, as noted by Shenpen Hookham and Shi Zhiru. *Rita Gross* remarked on the

irony that many Western Buddhists, despite their rationalistic education, abandon critical discernment and prefer myths to history. This is regrettable, as Western Buddhists have their own contribution to make to the further development of Buddhism.

Kajsa Ahlstrand, referring to the World Values Survey, pointed to changing attitudes to obedience, disobedience and rebellion. Disobedience is now seen as praiseworthy, whereas obedience could be harmful to one's mental health. Obedience in this 'new key' emphasises rights over duties. One can thus identify varieties of Christianity that are 'hard' or 'soft', 'strong' or 'mild' in various combinations, which she illustrated using different cheeses (thereby causing some puzzlement among the Asian participants!). We were left with the question whether there is an unchanging essence of eternal truth in either tradition which is beyond historical change and sociological conditioning, and the realisation that both obedience and disobedience can go terribly wrong. As *Rita Gross* concluded, it is our attachment that is the problem, not the things we are attached to.

Spiritual authority is central to both Buddhism and Christianity, but it can take very different forms. *Shenpen Hookham* maintained that for Buddhists spiritual authority resides in enlightened people, whether monastic or lay, and is the result of realisation rather than learning. The visible monastic *sangha* merely 'represents' the *ariyasangha* of the truly enlightened (though this was later contested). The authority to teach derives directly from the teacher's spiritual attainments or his or her status as the reincarnation of a previous teacher, but these qualities are unverifiable: How do we tell? Is the line of succession sufficient guarantee of authenticity? In the end, one comes to believe in the genuineness of one's teachers because, like the Buddha, they have validated the Four Noble Truths in their own experience and conduct.

Aspects of this question from the Christian side were presented by *Karl Baier* in a comprehensive survey of the development of spiritual guidance as a form of authority in Christian monasticism, which was extremely informative for the Buddhist participants. He defined such authority as 'the recognised power in a community to create and support an opening of life to union with a redeeming ultimate reality', showing how it was accepted very early alongside episcopal authority

but gradually became institutionalised and clericalised as the monastic life became established. There was tension between the inner guidance of the Spirit and the teaching authority of the *magisterium*, which was reinforced by Protestant suspicion of monasticism and found no parallel in Orthodox traditions.

Here, the authority of the saintly *staretz* derived from his acknowledgement by the people, often independently of ordination. Nevertheless, the importance of spiritual friendship was preserved in the West as well, leading to a certain mutuality in the relationship between director and directee which Buddhists would recognise as a form of *kalanyamitta*. Today, spiritual direction is becoming professionalized, with laypeople – including those of other Christian confessions and religious faiths – being trained with the help of psychotherapy in Catholic centres. Once again, the question of spiritual lineages and their relationship to chains of ordination such as apostolic succession was raised, anticipating later discussion of the ordination of women in Buddhism and Christianity.

Central to all these discussions, though in characteristically different ways, is the authority of scripture, and we were treated to a lively presentation on this from a Buddhist perspective by *Shi Zhiru*. She reminded us that Buddhism itself arose as a critique of ‘scripture’, and once again the *Kalamasutta* was cited as an appeal to one’s own experience and judgement rather than the authority of tradition. This is counterbalanced, however, by the legacy of the *Mahaparinibbanasutta*, in which the Dharma is to be one’s ‘lamp’ (other Buddhists insisted on the translation ‘island’). We know this, of course, because it is contained in Buddhist ‘scripture’, now bearing the authority implied in the phrase ‘Thus have I heard...’ The *Buddhavacana* acquire an authority parallel to that of the Vedas. It is thus not surprising that the Mahayana arose as a renewed critique, this time produced in a literary culture by lay followers and in writing, in sharp contrast to the oral tradition of the monks and with visionary elements. These scriptures thus have a tendency to self-advertisement, as in the *Lotus Sutra*. This is Buddhism criticising Buddhism, even to the extent of seeking authority outside the scripture altogether in the nature of the enlightened mind as recognised by an enlightened teacher, as in Chinese Ch’an. On the other hand, scriptures became sacred physical objects with magical powers, to be copied or

inserted in Buddha statues and *stupas*. The continuity between these two divergent developments seems to be that traditional scriptures were acknowledged to have implicit and well as explicit meanings.

Reinhold Bernhardt’s survey of Christian attitudes to scripture began with the category of inspiration: for the Reformers, not only were the biblical writers instruments of the divine Author, but the reader too is inspired, and the *viva vox evangelii* has soteriological efficacy. Indeed, for Luther the Bible is ‘Christ’s spiritual body’. However, there is a ‘Gospel within the Gospel’ which acts as a criterion of authenticity, whereas for Calvin every part of the Bible is inspired and the Old Testament was given a prominent place in the liturgy. The Bible is self-certifying and needs no external legitimation. Here, of course, are the seeds of literalism and fundamentalism, though there is another spiritualist tradition for which the Spirit supersedes the text and new revelation is always possible. Historical and literary criticism of the Bible led to a reappraisal of all these questions, and the New Criticism concentrated on the text as such, including reader response. The text is normative and contains a message *pro me*. It is a ‘classic’ in the sense given currency by David Tracy, with a ‘non-authoritarian authority’. For the Roman Catholic Church, the *magisterium* or teaching office, not the individual, is the normative interpreter, but according to Vatican II the Church teaches only what it finds in the Bible.

We are left with the problem of the relationship between revelation and history as the medium in which God reveals Godself. The origin of biblical authority lies in a transformative experience; it is practical rather than theoretical and relies on a ‘sense of the infinite’ which is ultimately universal. Yet the universal truth it discloses is personal, relational and existential. Discussion centred on the extent to which scriptures function as an absolute norm in the two traditions and their sub-traditions: in different senses, each canon is closed and needs to be interpreted, translated and mediated; each community can be said to believe *through* its scriptures, not *in* them.

The discussion moved to a different, more practical key when it came to the forms in which authority is institutionalised in each tradition. *Ven. Dhammananda (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh)* launched straight into the vexed question of the ordination of

women in Buddhism, prefacing her account of her own experience in Thailand by affirming the inseparability of spiritual and institutional authority and the overriding importance of spiritual freedom.

The Buddha's reference to a learned monk as an 'empty text master' is a reminder that the essential prerequisite for enlightenment is not learning but the laying down of pride. She was no doubt thinking of her struggles with the Thai (male) *sangha* to have female ordination recognised. According to the conventional account, the Thai lineage was derived from the Singhalese in the thirteenth century, whence it was regained from the Thais in the eighteenth century – but only male ordination was revived, not female. With the accession of Rama I in 1782, the Thai *sangha* was placed under the jurisdiction of the government, and in 1928 the *Sangharaja* decreed that Thai monks were not to ordain women. This decree should be regarded as having been rescinded when constitutional monarchy was introduced in 1932. However, the Thai authorities refused to implement this, and the Taiwanese began ordaining nuns from other jurisdictions in 1998. It is at least recognised that these *bhikkhuni* are not illegal, and on condition that they absolve two years as *samaneri* or novices they may now receive full ordination. They still have low social status; on applying to renew her passport, Ven. Dhammananda was told that the category *bhikkhuni* was 'not in the computer code' of the government department!

From the Christian side, *Terrence Merrigan* presented the fundamentals of Catholic teaching on the nature and function of the Church, derived from its belief that Jesus is the unsurpassed self-revelation of God and the self-embodiment of the divine. The Church exists to allow men and women to appropriate this saving presence of God. In the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, authoritative office-holders are charged with maintaining the integrity of this tradition; they are regarded by believers as 'mediatory bodies', God-given channels through which the saving presence of God is made visibly and tangibly present. In the Protestant churches, likeminded Christians agree on the interpretation of the biblical word, regarding themselves as having been called to salvation by the Word of God, whose saving presence is rendered accessible wherever that Word is preached and received in faith. Each tradition cherishes the gift of redemption as something already achieved, and the path to its

religious end always leads through the community which guarantees the validity of the tradition. Whereas for Protestants the criterion for recognising authority is subjective and lies in the personal experience of interpreting the Bible, for Catholics authority resides in the office of those appointed to teach. Just as this can lead to clericalism and institutional authoritarianism, so Protestant subjectivism can lead to individual authoritarianism and prophetism. These relationships were resolved by John Henry Newman into those between the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices in the Church. In the never-ending attempt to balance these, tensions and battles with authority can only be healthy for the Church.

In discussion it was pointed out that Buddhists, too, have to deal with the relationship between the *ariyasangha* of the Perfected Ones and the visible institutional *sangha*. To which *sangha* does one 'take refuge'? Women are indisputably members of the *ariyasangha*, so if this is 'represented' by the institutional *sangha*, why can they not be ordained?

The session on the relationship of the two traditions to political authority was to have been led off by *Whalen Lai*, but as he was prevented by ill health from attending he was replaced by a panel of four Buddhist participants after an overview of the Christian position by *Michael von Brück*. He made clear that there is no one Christian or scriptural answer to the question: the early church had no political theology or philosophy. In the Christian history of Europe, both apocalyptic and utopian traditions emerged, the former asserting that history is guided by God to a final outcome, the latter affirming that history has been or will be 'better', in another time, another place or another consciousness. The Jewish suspicion of the institution of the monarchy as a rival to God's authority remains alive, but also the Jewish conviction that God's approval of political authority is conditional upon the keeping of God's covenant: such authority is legitimate if it integrates justice, power and love. The Messiah is kingly but not a king: he renounces power and suffers. Christians, whose 'citizenship is in heaven' (Phil. 3:20), nevertheless inherited a Roman empire based on law, and since St. Augustine they live out the dialectic between a divine and a worldly polity. The famous conflict between throne and altar, however, is oversimplified: both pope *and* emperor claimed to represent both spiritual *and* temporal power. The synthesis

between the two is symbolised in the great medieval cathedrals, which represent in stone, glass and mural the pilgrimage through the stages of life and the orders of the universe, but also a hierarchy of power.

The Buddhist responses to this comprehensive overview and the ensuing discussion were extremely interesting. *Ven. Sonam Dorji* from Bhutan said that his government's policy was to increase the Gross National Happiness of its citizens, but the political leader need not – and indeed, in the modern world cannot – be a religious person. His country, though not ripe for Western-style democracy, upholds the separation of religious institutions from the state. *Ven. Dhammananda*, on the other hand, was of the opinion that in a country that is 95% Buddhist, such as Thailand, the king must be a Buddhist. This has been the case under both absolute and constitutional monarchies, and even for politicians adherence to Buddhist teaching is a criterion of their popularity. She agreed with Buddhadasa that a 'dhammic dictatorial socialism' is the better option for a country where many citizens have a low educational standard. From a Zen point of view, *Hyon Gak Sunim* from South Korea admitted that the Zen insistence that the ultimate Law (*dharma*) is the True Self opens up the prospect of a disconnect between this and 'real' law and politics. Yet all Buddhism, by definition, should be 'socially engaged', though it is a dualistic simplification to suppose that this means abandoning retreats and meditation centres for social activism. In countries that are 'not ripe for democracy', is an 'awakened Zen dictator' the answer?

Finally, *Kurt Krammer* pointed out that his country, Austria, is the only one in Europe where Buddhism is recognised by the state as a religion alongside the various forms of Christianity, a situation that forces the very different varieties of Buddhism there to recognise one another and cooperate for their own good in areas such as education and tax exemption. This is producing a 'new kind of Buddhist' who is free to obey or disobey as conscience dictates. In secular states at least, he would prefer politicians to be 'enlightened' in the sense of the European Enlightenment!

In discussion it was pointed out that democracy implies more than individual voting in elections; the interplay of institutions is involved, and at a deeper level the national 'feeling' or myth which they embody.

The committed core of any religious tradition is bound to be a minority, and it is better to support a manageable political programme than a utopian vision than can never be implemented. Buddhist sects which trace their origins to Nichiren have a more combative orientation to society. Each tradition, Buddhist and Christian, has plural forms of authority which invoke much more than mere obedience but which, if not exercised properly, produce *dukkha*. Wisdom and compassion, both can surely agree, are in the end inseparable.

Though there was a wide age spectrum at the conference, there were fewer presentations of their work by research students than in recent years. These, however, were impressive, and the Network looks forward to its next conference under its new president, Dr Elizabeth Harris, at Liverpool Hope University, where she now lectures, on the theme 'Hope: A Form of Delusion? Buddhist and Christian Perspectives'. In the present global situation, this should provide a significant challenge to both traditions.

International Thomas Merton Society 2009 Meeting

Christine Bochen, Nazareth College

The Eleventh General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society was held June 11-14, 2009 at Nazareth College, Rochester, New York. The theme, "Bearing Witness to the Light: Merton's Challenge to a Fragmented World," invited presenters and participants to explore ways in which Thomas Merton serves as a model of creative interreligious dialogue and witnesses to its importance in building a world in which the dignity of every person is respected and nurtured.

General session speakers explored Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Hindu dimensions of Merton's life and writings. They included Judith Simmer-Brown; James Connor, OCSO; Herbert Mason; and Rachel Fell McDermott. In addition to Judith Simmer-Brown's presentation, "Profile of a Trappist Yogi: A Tibetan Buddhist Perspective," and Rachel Fell McDermott's presentation, "Why Zen Buddhism and Not Hinduism? The Asias of Thomas Merton's Voyage East," concurrent sessions focused on Merton and Buddhism,

Merton and Zen Buddhism, and Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh.

An exhibit of Merton's photographs, "A Hidden Wholeness: The Zen Photography of Thomas Merton," on loan from the Thomas Merton Center and Archives at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY, was on display during the meeting and through the summer in the Nazareth College library.

Parliament of the World's Religions

December 3-9, 2009
Melbourne, Australia

The 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions is now just weeks away. An estimated 8,000-12,000 religious leaders, scholars, artists, and activists will gather in Melbourne, Australia for seven days of interreligious encounter and celebration.

The theme for the meeting is "Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth."

The Dalai Lama will address the multi-faith gathering at the Parliament's closing ceremony on December 9. The following day will mark the 20th anniversary of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama.

Other major speakers and performers will include: Prof. Joy Murphy Wandin, Sri Ravi Shankar, Chief Oren Lyons, Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, Dr. Natesan Ramani, Rabbi David Rosen, Dalia Mogahed, Dr. Ishmael Noko, Dr. Kim Cunio, Heather Lee, Prof. Wande Abimbola, Rev. Tim Costello, Manjiri Kelkar, and Hugh Evans.

Information regarding registration, fees, accommodations, program details, the call for abstracts, and pre-Parliament events can be found at www.parliamentofreligions2009.org.



New On-Line Journal Launched

The on-line, peer-reviewed *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* published its inaugural issue in

April, 2009. According to its website, the Journal "is a forum for academic, social, and timely issues affecting religious communities around the world. Published online, it is designed to increase both the quality and frequency of interchanges between religious groups and their leaders and scholars. By fostering communication, the Journal hopes to contribute to a more tolerant, pluralistic society."

For more information, explore the Journal's website at <http://irdialogue.org/>.

BRC Becomes Ikeda Center

The Boston Research Center, founded in 1993 and well known for its contributions to non-violence, creative education, and global awareness, now has a new name: The Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue.

Named after Soka Gakkai International president Daisaku Ikeda, the Center hosts programs on a wide range of peace and justice issues as well as contemporary philosophical conversations and interreligious dialogue.

Ikeda Center books, such as *Creating Waldens*, *Subverting Hatred*, *Ethical Visions of Education*, and *Buddhist Peacework*, are available for use as academic textbooks.

For information, contact the Center at 396 Harvard Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA, or www.ikedacenter.org.

Eastman Given Transmission as Sensei

Fr. Patrick Kundo Eastman was recently installed as Sensei in the White Plum lineage by Fr. Robert Kennedy Roshi, SJ, of Morning Star Zendo, author of *Zen Spirit*, *Christian Spirit* and *Zen Gifts to Christians*. A Roman Catholic priest and Oblate of the Camaldolese Benedictines, Fr. Patrick studied with Dr. Ruben Habito Roshi and Abbot John Daido Looi Roshi.

Fr. Eastman now directs the Wild Goose Sangha in the Cotswolds, England. See his website for details: www.wildgoosesangha.org.uk. The postal address is 30 North Wall, Cricklade, Wiltshire, SN6 6DU.

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Visit the SBCS Website

www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

The *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter* is published two times annually: in the spring and the fall. Please contact the Editor to share information with our readers. The deadline for the spring issue is March 1. The deadline for the fall issue is September 1. Your contributions ensure the continued existence of our newsletter. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and length. Send items as MS Word attachments to Peter Huff: phuff@centenary.edu. All other correspondence may be sent to:

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SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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To enroll as a member of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, send your name, address, and membership fee to:

SBCS Membership
c/o Dr. Harry Wells
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA 95521 USA

Enclose a check for \$45.00 (\$25.00 for students, senior citizens, and monastics) payable to "Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies." The Society cannot accept foreign currency or personal checks from foreign countries unless drawn on a U.S. bank. International money orders in U.S. dollars are acceptable.

Members receive the Society's *Newsletter* and our annual journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.